

RCS 421003

**THE WORLD CONFERENCE
FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF QUESTIONS
TOUCHING FAITH AND ORDER**



THE OBJECT AND METHOD OF CONFERENCE

Ἴνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσι, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ γὼ ἐν σοὶ, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῶν ἐν ᾧσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύσῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

Ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu Pater in me, et ego in te, ut et ipsi in nobis unum sint, ut credat mundus, quia tu me misisti.

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

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THE OBJECT AND METHOD OF CONFERENCE

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INTRODUCTION

IS Christian unity desirable? Is it possible? Is it possible at this time to do anything to forward it directly? If so, what can we do best?

We have here four questions. Probably we may assume that all Christians are agreed in some form or other about the first, but we are not justified in assuming any further agreement. Even those who most love diversity would desire that we should unite in recognizing its value, but certainly many Christians believe that unity is in itself not possible. A still larger number believe that it is not possible to do anything usefully, that is, at least, anything more than we are doing. If we each go on our own way, perhaps the truth will emerge some day as by a process of natural selection.

The question of possibility we will for the moment pass over, but it is worth noting that disbelief in the matter is not so much a dogmatic position as an accentuation of doubt, and from doubt not even the most hopeful are entirely free. In considering what can be done, and in showing what seems the most effective method, we are providing some answer to other people's doubts as well as our own.

Our immediate concern, therefore, is with the fourth question, What is the best way of forwarding unity? And here we find a division of opinion which is for our purpose more significant.

(a) Some people are looking eagerly for practical proposals, and are somewhat impatient of continued discussions which bear no obvious fruit.

(b) Others believe that practical proposals at this stage are alto-

gether premature, and are likely to lead only to an intensified bitterness of division. They would maintain that our first need is a better mutual understanding, which they think might be reached by Conference.

It is obvious that these two classes are thinking of two different kinds of division.

(a) In all lines of life there are differences of opinion as to the relative convenience or effectiveness of different methods. Where united action is of importance, the difference must be met by practical adjustment.

(b) It is, however, the peculiarity of religion that it is concerned primarily with aims, principles or motives; methods and procedures are to it secondary. Accordingly religious differences are primarily differences of conviction, and they must be treated as such. It is useless to ask, and we have no right to ask, men to drop real convictions for the sake of convenience.

It need not be doubted, therefore, that there are many questions of a purely practical kind which might be sufficiently dealt with by practical adjustment. But it is also plain that there are many questions which directly or indirectly concern differences of conviction. In both cases the method of Conference may be found useful, but in dealing with convictions there does not seem to be any other way open.

To these proposed Conferences there is, however, one grave objection. We have admitted above that there are many, earnestly desiring unity, who do not believe it possible to do anything for it usefully, and that their fears may well be shared by us all. Before we go further, we will try to summarize their reasoning, for if we are to come through safely, we must first realize what dangers we are incurring.

We can put their case in this way: "Our existing differences arise from differences of conviction. (a) If you try to meet these by purely practical measures, you ignore the convictions as if they were of secondary importance. Thereby you only justify the angry protests of those who feel the convictions most strongly, and we are most anxious that they should not be ignored. And these protests will justify the counter-protests of those who do not share, or

perhaps feel less strongly about, the convictions in question, but who realize better the practical needs.

“(b) When you invite us to a Conference, either the points of difference must be held in abeyance, or they must be frankly stated and argued.

“A Conference in which the members are not allowed to say what they really mean is simply mischievous, for the representation of a fictitious unity only serves to alienate those who are being misrepresented.

“If, however, the Conference allows the discussion of differences, it involves itself in controversy, which all experience shows to be unprofitable. Men reach truth, men learn, by quiet thinking, and we know well enough that when men get to arguing with one another, the anxiety for victory is too absorbing to leave room for thinking or even for the desire to learn.”

In these contentions there is only too much truth. The dangers are very real, and no one ought to be blamed if he is unwilling to face them. Is it, however, impossible to meet them? In private life we know that, although the most friendly discussions may at any moment degenerate into mere argumentative controversy, it is nevertheless possible to maintain such discussions on a level in the highest degree profitable and helpful.

Many people talk as if the difficulty were a quite simple matter. In their view, there would be no danger if we would keep the spirit of charity, tolerance, Christian forbearance, and ordinary courtesy. It seems to them strange that Christian discussions should so often show the greatest lack of brotherliness.

All this may be quite true, and yet by itself of very little practical help. It is not much use telling us how we ought to act, if people cannot act that way when the need arises. We know only too well that, even in the most heated arguments, no one has any intention of offending, no one is conscious or will admit that he does offend against these abstract virtues. For the virtues cited are the virtues of a serene and quiet mind, while the sins of controversy are the sins of excitement, and under excitement we cannot judge correctly the requirements of serenity.

Let us by all means keep the abstract ideal clearly before us; but

the object of this paper is to consider the concrete forms and conditions under which a friendly discussion can go forward usefully, and at what points the controversial danger is especially liable to come in. If we can get a clear map of the right road, and of the points where we are most liable to stray from it, perhaps even then it may not be possible to go straight, but at least we shall be in a better condition to judge whether we can or not.

We have divided our paper into four parts:

I. We begin with a general view of the true spirit of Conference, the idea or aim, and the attitude of mind in which a Conference should be entered. The full significance of what is involved in this spirit can be explained better as we consider the course of a Conference.

II. Next, we have brought together some considerations as to the Principles of the Method which a Conference should follow, arranged under three special sections:

- i. The Conditions of Meeting.
- ii. The Principle of Representation.
- iii. The Attitude to Sectionalism.

III. Then, we consider the Principles of Discussion, taking first the general Principles, and then in special sections:

- iv. The Change and Progress of Questions.
- v. The Use of Terms.
- vi. Mutual Criticism.
- vii. The Continuity and End of Conferences.

IV. Lastly, for the guidance of discussion, we have tried to summarize these Principles in a few practical rules, easy to remember and refer to.

I. THE TRUE IDEA OF CONFERENCE

THE usefulness of a Conference depends on the maintenance of a truespirit of Conference. That is admitted, but the maintenance of such spirit depends on a clear understanding on both sides of the idea, of the aim or purpose, which has brought its members together. With the best intentions in the world, friction of all kinds is certain to arise where men believe they are pursuing a common aim when in fact they have different aims, or different ideas of what that aim implies. Unless we have a genuine agreement here, it is better not to come together at all, and we can hardly make our agreement too definite.

At the same time it is no less necessary to remember that ideas, aims and so forth are not things which can be finally expressed as if we already held them in our possession. They are rather things to which we come as we learn more of their meaning. Besides our initial agreement, we must exercise a watch during our discussions that we shall move towards our aim, which may indeed be easily lost at any moment.

We have to recognize that there seem to be two obvious classes of questions to consider. Some are only differences of practical procedure or method, where we need only inquire what effectiveness is claimed on each side, and what evidence of that effectiveness can be offered and verified. Other questions concern differences of conviction. Certainly, then, it is important that we should be clear what class of questions we are dealing with; but unfortunately our distinctions are not at all so simple as they appear.

In the first place, while some differences of method may be purely practical, many more are the expression of different convictions, and nothing but misunderstanding will arise from treating them as if they were only matters of relative efficiency.

Further, this confusion runs through the whole discussion. Everybody justifies his convictions upon some ground of their practical effect on men's lives; at the same time, everybody who is discussing effects does so according to his own convictions of what is worth effecting.

Though it is important, therefore, that we should keep the abstract distinction between methods and convictions in our minds, the notion that we can completely separate them is an illusion. Our main business is with our convictions; and when we are at one in our aims, in our ideals and thoughts, practical differences will settle themselves. If we are not at one in our minds, no amount of practical agreements will effect anything, unless perchance misunderstandings which provide material for fresh quarrels. No doubt differences of conviction are the most difficult to deal with (some say the most hopeless), but if we do not face them, any other efforts will lead only to increased confusion. Without, therefore, trying to decide what will come of it, we may at least consider how they ought to be faced.

The line of cleavage between profitless controversy and profitable discussion can be made sufficiently clear. Two men differ in convictions, *i.e.*, each holds an opinion he believes to be correct. Each, fixing his mind on the subject, is anxious to prove his own view, *i.e.*, tries to instruct the other. Each listens to his opponent in order to answer him, *i.e.*, to correct his errors. And this is controversy.

On the other hand, holding their convictions with equal assurance, each, fixing his attention not only on the subject itself, but on the other man's view of the subject, is anxious to learn what that is. Each, while ready to give the desired instruction concerning his own view, is also essentially an inquirer. He listens, not in order to refute, but in order to learn, pressing his own reasonings, not as conclusions, but as difficulties, in order to see how the other man answers them.

Controversy consists essentially of instruction, and its purpose is agreement; the essence of discussion is inquiry, and its purpose is to understand. Now it may be urged that mutual understanding is not the same as agreement, and does not imply unity, though it may be a necessary preliminary. And it may be urged further, that there is a real danger in paying so much attention to opinions. Our business is with the truth.

Controversy goes wrong when we start arguing about our convictions, instead of seeking the truth; and for this reason: save in

scientific questions of narrow interest, convictions are not often produced by argument. In our own case we know well enough that all our serious life convictions grew up with us, made us far more than we ever made them; since the beginning they have been moulded, modified, grown into, by years of thinking and experience. It is possible in arguing to open a man's eyes to new lines of thought, but a conviction that is to be worth anything must come of a man's own thinking. At most we can only start him thinking or contribute suggestions.

The idea of controversy rests on the assumption that just as a conviction can be expressed or justified in an agreement, so it can be overthrown or changed by an argument. But we know perfectly well that to express a life conviction in an argument is a difficult matter. Such convictions can rarely be expressed adequately; many people cannot express them at all. Why do you believe in God? Why do you believe in the existence of your friends? When we say that "unless a man is a fool, he must have reasons for his beliefs," we do not mean that he can explain them on the spur of the moment. Perhaps he is not even conscious of some of them.

Here we may see both the difficulty and the importance of discussion. The ostensible object of the inquiry is to enable each of us to understand the other man's position. That may be difficult, for the fact is that neither of us fully understands his own. But then it is very important we should, and there are few ways so helpful as trying to explain to some one else, who will tell us frankly when he does not see our point.

The ulterior object of Conferences, as of all sincere thought and discussion, is to ascertain the truth. To this end Conferences are useful, provided we are quite frank, since no good comes of vague amiabilities; and provided we keep off being controversial, since only mischief comes from quarrelling. The essential condition of success is adherence to the Conference purpose and to the Conference method.

(a) The purpose of Conference is a better understanding of the convictions of other people. Incidentally, a valuable product may sometimes be found in realizing the meaning of our own convictions.

(b) The method of Conference is inquiry. Our search should be directed not so much to the discovery of agreements, as to an appreciation of differences.

We must not look for results outside the purpose and the method of Conference. New agreements may arise if it develop that common convictions are embodied in divergent expressions; but we must not be disappointed if we are unable to perceive changes of really opposing convictions. On the contrary, we should be well satisfied if all parties, or even some parties, come to understand better than before what their essential differences are, and what new aspects of the truth they represent.

II. PRINCIPLES OF METHOD

A CONFERENCE will be helpful only if its members honestly desire to receive as well as to give help, at least this far, that they desire to learn what others are thinking, *i. e.*, what their ideas or convictions are, what exactly they mean by them, and how they apply them.

Let us begin from our own point of view. We think we understand our own position. Probably others also think they understand it, but we are hoping that we can show them values in it which they have not seen. It is possible that, as they get to know our position better, we might get them to see that there are needs which we might help them to supply. But if we look at things impartially, we must remember that this is also their attitude. We may find that others have meanings which we have not seen, and perhaps our position also has needs we had not recognized, but which their position might help to fill.

We must be prepared to face new questions, not only in regard to the views of others which we have not studied, but even in regard to our own, however carefully we may have thought them out. A man's convictions belong to his life. If they are worth anything, they must mean more to him than he has ever realized, and it is almost certain that there will be defects that he has not considered. He may have all his pet theories and his most trusted arguments at his fingers' ends, but in Conference we want to get past these to his real thoughts, and we can do so only under conditions which make real thinking possible.

(i) *Conditions of Meeting*

The first condition is a small number of participants. Our purpose has two somewhat distinct parts. The first and simplest is to learn from one another the meaning of the different positions we occupy, so far as we have been able to state them for ourselves. In the second place, we want to consider these positions together, opening up the partly unexplored country that lies behind them.

Conferences are of many kinds, and may be held for many purposes. The term is often used for what are not in fact Conferences at all, but public meetings, gathered to listen to addresses. With these we are not here concerned.

A large Conference differs from a small Conference fundamentally in the presence of an audience, that is, of a number of people who are not for the most part taking any share in the discussion. The audience is the main factor; and so far as the elucidation of the subject goes, it is a dangerous factor, because its intelligence is much less readily reached than its feelings. We may believe that many will think seriously over new and weighty arguments, but we also know that all will cheer enthusiastically at a telling expression of their own views. On the other hand, a man who holds views with which the audience is not in sympathy is greatly cramped in expressing them, or is tempted to express them aggressively. Public meetings give a very poor indication of what people really feel, and little or none of what they are thinking.

The second part of our purpose—the opening up, the development and exploration of positions, the facing of new questions—can only take place in a discussion which is more like a conversation than a debate, where, free from the rules of debate, questions can be asked and re-statements and explanations made. When a position has been stated, and criticisms have been offered, if any progress is to be made, we want opportunity to hear how far the original speaker will admit that his position was affected.

It is obvious that new questions cannot be seriously thought over in the presence of an audience waiting for something to applaud or to condemn. No one can be expected to reconsider new aspects of his position in the presence of people some of whom are almost certain to misunderstand what is being said.

For real progress we must look to small Conferences, which should as a rule consist only of those who are actually taking part, or who might take part, in the discussions. At most, only those should be asked who can be trusted to follow the real lines of thought and to distinguish between a definite statement and a

tentative admission. It is with these small Conferences that we are here concerned.

It is necessary that there should be a Chairman, a programme and the customary rules of an informal discussion; but neither the programme nor the rules need be rigidly kept. The Chairman ought to be clear as to the purpose of the Conference, and in sympathy with its members. It is his business to guide the discussions in accordance with their purpose, to see that they do not wander over too many points, but that each is fully worked out before the next is brought up. If, however, the Conference feels that it can handle questions better in some different order than that set out, it should not feel itself rigidly bound by its own plans.

(ii) *Presentation of Views*

Since in our Conference we are engaged in an inquiry, in all discussion this fundamental rule must be maintained: Each member is alone authorized to state and explain his own views. Every one else is merely an inquirer.

In maintaining the courtesy and good temper of discussion and for the attainment of any useful result, this principle is of the first importance. It is quite natural to feel annoyed at the expression of inconsequent opinions, or bored at the expression of platitudes, but it is not good manners to betray our feelings. A man has a right to say what he thinks, as well as he can. Even if we cannot express ourselves well, all of us very much resent being told what we think by somebody else.

Of course we ought to recognize that the principle may sometimes fail in its application. A man is never a perfect witness, and owing to intellectual or to volitional difficulties he may be a bad witness, to his own convictions.

Many people have not a clear, definite idea of what they really mean, even in regard to their strong convictions. Many, also, under excitement, on meeting new questions, when the spirit of controversy is pressing on them, may be unable to bring themselves frankly to face their real meaning, and especially the weaknesses or inconsistencies of their position.

It would save much trouble if we all would realize from the start

that these faults belong to us all. None of us are conscious of our whole meaning. All are subject to will-prejudice; none wholly escape from it.

It is therefore not only possible that we may, but probable that to some extent we do, understand other people better than they understand themselves. And other people will understand us better. This is the gain of Conference. We may look for help in understanding ourselves as well as in understanding others.

Nevertheless, for practical purposes the rule of self-expression must be kept. We are all apt to think we understand a great deal better than we do. Besides, we are concerned with other men's views as they suppose themselves to hold them. Our fancied interpretation of them will be helpful only if the other man avails himself of it. We may make suggestions and ask questions, but he who enunciates a conviction is our leader in the inquiry, and we must take it on his own terms.

In speaking of another man's view, therefore, the forms proper to inquiry should be clearly observed, so as to avoid even the appearance of passing judgment. No one has a right to say, "Your view is inconsistent, illogical, heretical," etc. Theoretically, one might say, "That seems to me," etc., but even this suggests an imputation, where we are looking for explanations.

Whatever difficulties or impossibilities a man's views seem to involve, we must at least begin with the assumption that he himself sees a way round, or a way through,—either he thinks he can evade the result, or he does not think the result objectionable. We are free to state any difficulty or objection we think is involved, and we may put it as an argument, but we must be careful that neither form of statement nor tone of voice shall imply that the other man cannot answer. That, besides being bad manners, is bad policy, since it provokes the other man to invent an answer when otherwise he might have admitted the validity of the objection; and frank admissions are a great help. No position is entirely free from difficulties. No one should be expected to have anticipated all the difficulties of his position; and a mere dialectical triumph over a conferee upon a novel objection is altogether incompatible with the Conference spirit.

(iii) *Attitude to Sectionalism*

Most of what has been said so far is equally applicable to Conferences on any subject, but there are special difficulties about those concerned with ecclesiastical questions. In a Theological Conference we are thinking of personal unity and an agreement of personal views, which are relatively simple matters, but in a Conference looking for ecclesiastical unity we have to consider the views of religious bodies, and these are very complex matters.

All religious bodies have their own distinctive principles. The unity we wish to reach must be a unity of principles. But the difficulty we found in determining the real meaning of our convictions is enormously intensified when we are trying to determine the principles, that is, the convictions, of a large organized society.

Most religious bodies have formulas of various kinds which appear to provide an explicit statement of their principles, but which do provide an authoritative statement only on certain points, in which the principles as a whole are implicit. Some of these formulas represent the principles of the body very adequately, and some very inadequately. The authority assigned to them varies greatly, although their real influence, especially upon the mass of the body, is in general much larger than the conscious deference paid to them.

A more living witness to the principles of a body is provided by its actual practice and especially by its forms of worship; since practice is on one side the most direct and natural expression of the spirit, on the other side it is disciplining and moulding the spirit.

We have in fact to consider principles in two different ways: (1) There are the true principles of a body, by which it lives. (2) There is a popular understanding of them, which may be on the surface an amalgam of the true principles, half-understood, partly acquiesced in, with all sorts of ideas which the habit of the day makes easy. Underneath this surface, however, there is often a latent strength of convictions which may manifest itself very unexpectedly.

The difficulty is shown, and increased, by the fact that all bodies

are divided by parties or sections which take very different views of the principles. But from all this we must not infer that principles have no real meaning. In the political life of a nation to-day we hardly hear of anything except differences, but that is not because the nation has no unity. If the nation were not a unity, there would be no differences. It is the strength with which men realize their unity which makes them differ so warmly. All day long men are taking their unity for granted; all their actions are based on it. They do not talk about it because it does not need talking about. Of our differences we talk and think a great deal, because differences call for discussion. This disproportion between the real importance of things and the attention we give to them is almost inevitable, but we must not allow ourselves to be misled by it. In religion and in politics there is a certain unity of spiritual life and principle. The political unity is real, though there may be differences of opinion as to what it is. There is also a unity of convenience, and about convenience there are not only differences of opinion but also real differences. The unity of religious bodies is therefore more real in proportion as principles are more truly the ground of their existence, and convenience more a secondary matter than in politics.

A Conference considering unity is concerned with the unity of bodies, according to their true principles. It is concerned with sectionalism only because it is forced to deal with principles as they are actually realized by those concerned. So far as it is necessary to consider sectional questions, the same method must be observed. It belongs to the representatives of each body to explain its differences as well as its beliefs, how much those differences really mean, what practical effect they have, and how they are reconciled. Representatives of other bodies are only inquirers.

Since the Conference has, therefore, to depend on the representatives to explain the positions which are to be considered, each representative—though he can, of course, only explain things as he understands them—must speak for his body, rather than of his own personal views. If he should be asked about the sectional views, he must do his best to explain their meaning, remembering that the Conference is more concerned to get at the real prin-

ciples which bind together than to hear about the differences of opinions, or of the degrees in which the principles are realized. If any representative feels himself entirely out of sympathy, or opposed to, the views of any section in his own body, he ought to say simply that he cannot explain it. Sectional differences of this kind cannot be discussed at a general Conference.

III. THE CONDUCT OF DISCUSSION

IN a general way, everybody realizes the difference between a man's arguments and his reasons. Clearly it is the same as the difference between controversy and discussion, between attempts to prove and efforts to explain. It lies at the root of the difficulty of knowing the meaning of one's own convictions. It is so entirely the purpose of discussion to deal with these difficulties and differences that it is well here to examine them carefully.

Every one comes to and maintains a conviction for certain reasons which lie in the history and experience of his own life. These reasons determine his real meaning; they are much more than the scaffolding by which his conviction was reached. The real meaning is often obscure, because no one can recover more than fragments of what has really weighed in the forming of his own mind.

Arguments are hypothetical reasons by which certain conclusions may be reached. They are, of course, immensely simpler than any actual reasonings, and they are also more complete. A knowledge of such possible reasonings may be a great help in unravelling the tangled chain of our own thinking, but such arguments will rarely represent our actual reasoning accurately, and the conclusion they come to will never have quite the same content as our own conviction. Indeed, the theories we form by their aid may mislead us very seriously.

We can make these points clear by examining an instance. Our belief in God was perhaps first suggested by our parents, but it has grown up and connected itself with all our thinking and all our experience. We can and do think of God in many ways, — as the God of Nature, as Ruler of the lives of men, as the Ultimate Reality, as the Friend of Souls. Each line of reflection leads to its own conclusion, so that to the heathen there are as many gods as there are lines of reflection. To us there is one God, in whom all lines meet. Although now one, now another, thought may be uppermost in our minds, it is only when we study "Arguments for Theism" that we become conscious of the difference

between them. This is so far a gain, but we must not confuse the arguments with the reasonings.

The traditional theologians are said to have laid special stress on the argument from Creation, and certainly they thought of God as Creator, but they also thought of Him in many other ways. Modern theologians criticize the validity of the old arguments, and lay almost exclusive stress on personal experience. Do they think of God differently? No doubt to many God has become mainly a phase of the personal life. But in practical life it is often amazing how little heed people give to their professed arguments; sometimes also it is amazing how much effect they have.

We need not, therefore, deny the importance of arguments in a man's real intellectual life, but we must recognize that their use is subject to two weaknesses. In an argument we can at most show the path up which a man's mind might and perhaps ought to go, but if his mind does not possess the necessary experience or values required by that reasoning, then he will not be able to go up it. Mathematical reasoning is a type of pure demonstration, but it demonstrates nothing whatever to a mind which has not learned to entertain the ideas which are being set out. This we may call the practical or empirical weakness of argument.

Again, mathematical demonstration is conclusive only because the ideas used are of so simple and fundamental a kind that no doubt can arise as to their meaning. In matters of the kind we are dealing with, there is hardly a single term, either in the conclusion or in any point of the reasoning, which admits of an absolute or final determination. This we may call the abstract or essential weakness of argument.

On the theoretical side there is no doubt an abstract truth, but we are only working towards it. None of us will reach it, and none of us ought to argue as though we had it in complete possession. A schoolmaster may explain with some authority the line which the schoolboy must follow, but then the schoolmaster is only explaining the well-known and settled elements of a subject to a mind which has formed no other ideas, and it still remains for the boy to follow the explanations as he best can. A university lecturer has to deal with much more advanced and dif-

ficult matters; he may indicate the probable conclusions, but his chief business is to show how inquiry is conducted. It is the essence of a Conference that its members are bringing together the necessary considerations which will make a wider reconsideration possible.

(iv) *The Change and Progress of Questions*

We have, therefore, to start with the assumption that each man has a position which he believes himself to have thought out, and which satisfies him. Others will probably know its general outlines, but are ignorant of what the terms mean to the holder and on what they rest. In fact, of course, no one ever has worked out all his meanings, or tested all the arguments he has picked up. At most, we can only say that in thinking our position out we are not conscious of having omitted anything. In every one's mind there is a certain bias which prevents his paying attention equally to all parts. The practical man probably will not have worked out those parts of his position which relate to theory, nor the orderly man what belongs to freedom.

It is a great help to have the different positions clearly stated at the beginning, but each inquirer will want to know more of how the leader, *i.e.*, the holder of a given position, deals with those matters which to the inquirer are of primary importance, and which are not unlikely to be those which the leader has least considered.

In following this course both parties should be prepared to find the real question at issue shifting from the immediate point to something else on which the difference really rests. If an imaginary Jesuit, who regards Sacraments as a gift to "works," is asking explanations of the sacramental doctrine held by an imaginary Lutheran, who regards them purely as incitements to faith, obviously, if there is to be any further progress, the parties must try to find what is the whole of their attitude to faith and works respectively.

In thus following questions up, there is one temptation of which to beware, and one great thing for which to hope. If the inquiry is to be genuine, the parties, and especially the leader, must beware

of false leadership. The imaginary Jesuit might easily find himself expounding the importance of moral action, when his mind is really concerned over the ecclesiastical authority which has prescribed the actions. The imaginary Lutheran may find himself defending the spiritual aspect of faith, when he is really working on a theory of scriptural teaching. In controversy this sort of thing is habitual, yet it is just here that the persistence of an inquirer in friendly discussion may help to clear the leader's mind as to his own meaning.

And there is a side of hope. That men are at bottom united, and that our differences are superficial, is, like all platitudes, irritating and useless, unless some one will tell us how to get below the surface. After all, it is on the surface of this planet that the sun shines and men live. Here also they fight; below it they lie only in death.

Our platitude is true enough if we can find a way to use it. We may do something to help it out with another platitude, that "our controversies come of the partisanship which will look only on one side of a question," and to this second platitude we can give a meaning very easily. We begin by assuming that a question must be answered with *this* or else *that*. And the assumption involves controversy, calls for proof, argument, refutation.

Our true first need is, of course, an inquiry into terms. S. Paul and S. James are at issue. But when we have realized what the one means by faith and the other by works, there is no difference between them.

Between the Jesuit and the Lutheran it is probable that a very sharp issue will remain, and it will continue, until, secondly, they abandon the whole initial assumption in order to begin an inquiry on a different hypothesis. Instead of asking whether the truth is this or that, we must ask how far, in what way, this and that are respectively true. If we look at the real nature of conviction, the immense experience covering far more than a single life, since all our beliefs are historic, the vast complexity of reasoning on which conviction rests, it is almost inconceivable that such conviction should be itself false, and yet it is probable that we shall have only a confused idea of its real meaning. When we look at the complexity of life itself, it is virtually certain that

we shall have a very imperfect grasp upon many things which are very necessary to us, but which our present convictions have not included; necessary perhaps even to the completeness of that conviction which occupies the centre of our mind.

In regard, therefore, even to our own convictions, we are engaged in inquiry. We must try to follow it out and to welcome all help, (*a*) in the effort to realize the exact value which we do in fact attach to the different grounds of our conviction; (*b*) to discover the limitations as well as the strength, the completeness and the incompleteness, of our convictions in relation to the whole view of life.

(v) *The Use of Epithets*

There are certain terms, such as heretical and orthodox, Romanist and Protestant, narrow-minded and latitudinarian, traditional and up-to-date, schismatic and sacerdotal, idolatrous, emotional, dogmatic, which are the bane of controversy. All are solid and useful descriptive terms, full of scientific meaning, but from their very convenience each theological circle takes a certain group of these terms to summarize the tendencies which it most dislikes. When this has been done, within the circle the use of a label seems to serve all the purposes of an argument. We call an opinion Roman, traditional or dogmatic, and so grateful is the human mind for the smooth traction of a line of rails, that amongst our own sympathizers the term not only saves us the trouble of explaining why the Roman or the traditional view is in this case wrong, it even saves us the further trouble of proving that the opinion is correctly thus described. In honest controversy the use of such question-begging terms should be carefully excluded.

In a discussion the case is different. Our own instinctive use of descriptive labels gives us a very helpful indication of what we are feeling or assuming to be the most dangerous or most objectionable features in the opposed position. Perhaps in the early stages of a discussion it may be wiser to withhold a possible provocation, but when we have acquired a little confidence in one another's tempers, and sympathy has justified frankness, there is hardly any better way of correcting our impressions of an alien

position than by asking its holder to tell us what he really thinks of the subjects indicated by such terms, how far he would admit that they indicated real dangers, and what countervailing advantage he sees.

(vi) *Criticism*

In a Conference, our most real danger is one of which we are least conscious. To-day we all hate controversy as much as our forefathers loved it; yet, while we know the evil of controversy, we are not in the least conscious of the evil of good nature. To us, the true significance of what is at stake is being smothered under an amiable agreement that nothing matters. When to us one thing is as good as another, we cease to see real good in anything. On occasion, we are all extremely polite, but we are no nearer to unity. Does any one really want unity on the assumption that his own convictions have so little living importance that other people may ignore them quite comfortably?

We meet to learn the real value of other men's views, and concurrently of our own. Common sense teaches us that no man can know the true meaning and value of convictions except he who has lived by them. But common sense ought also to teach us that a man is not a good judge of the incompleteness or defectiveness of his own position.

The degree in which criticism is possible is a good test of the mutual trust a Conference has acquired; but that it should be possible, it must be welcomed. The holder of a position under inquiry ought to be anxious to know not only how his view strikes other people on its intellectual side, but also according to what they have seen of its practical outcome.

Outside criticism is often very valuable and helpful, and that is a good first reason why it should be encouraged. It is often also very ignorant and very bitter, and these are, especially in Conference, very strong second and third reasons.

We ought to know that everybody is always criticizing everybody and everything, just in proportion as he has judged them worth thinking about. If in Conference people do not criticize us, we may be quite sure they are keeping something back. If

their criticism is seriously thought out, and based on knowledge, that reserve will be a loss to us. But if their criticism is based on ignorance, and it is not expressed, we are losing our best opportunity of getting things straightened out.

The only danger of criticism is the danger of bitterness, and that is a danger so great that neither the Conference itself nor the Chairman can encourage—they must discourage—criticism. The one person who can encourage it is the representative or person criticized. Criticism is embittered above everything else by its helplessness and ineffectiveness. We think a thing wrong. The modern beatification of amiability demands that we should not say so till we get home in our circle. Then—where it is of no use at all—we relieve our feelings. Criticism is embittered by the assumption of an attitude of faultlessness, which explains away every justification for criticism. Criticism becomes what criticism ought to be—considerate, respectful of what is good, unassertive—when it is met by a gentleness that can submit to criticism, an honesty that is willing to consider the possibility of defects, and a humility which is ready to confess their existence.

We do not commend, except in our own eyes, the soundness of our position by denying the existence of weaknesses. In the eyes of every one else we are only proving that those weaknesses are inseparable from the position itself.

(vii) *The Arrangement and End of Conferences*

A Conference will naturally begin with statements made by the various representatives on selected points, and it moves onward by a discussion which is in the form of an inquiry. Here are two parts, each of which has its own significance and possibilities.

(i) The statements, with the answers to questions where fuller explanation is desired, are informative or instructional in character; but there is an implied hope that as we gain a deeper insight into the true meaning of other men's convictions, and realize better the needs those convictions seem to meet, there may be also a negative gain: mere opposition will diminish.

(ii) This is still a long way from the positive unity which is our ultimate ideal. The cessation of opposition is an essential prelim-

inary, but by itself it involves only an acquiescence in difference. In looking to the discussion for progress, we imply that even our own convictions are, as in the nature of things they must be, greater, wider, full of more significance, than we have realized. As we try to explain how we believe our convictions meet needs which perhaps we have felt less strongly than others, we may very well find that our convictions themselves need, or even imply, convictions which we have hitherto treated as antithetical. It is possible for a man's views, without any abandonment, to undergo development in two ways: (*a*) we may say that our convictions remain valid, but are less complete, less universally applicable and all-sufficient, than we supposed them to be; (*b*) on the other hand, we only express the same thing in a different way if we say that our convictions remain, but that our conscious realization of them was incomplete. However we put it, what is this but to say that while we cannot believe our faith is vain, we know we have a great deal to learn, and we do not claim infallibility? We meet in Conference only because we look to others to take this position. We are justified in going to a Conference only if we are willing to take that position ourselves.

Of course such modification is a very serious thing. Our convictions are not ideas we have formed from an argument; they are things which have grown into our life. Modifications, which are really developments, in conviction grow upon us in the same way. It is therefore not only foolish but even dangerous to look for immediate results from our discussions. There begins to dawn on some a vision of other lands which they have never yet visited. If left to themselves, they may go there quietly, take a look at things, and see what they can make of them, but we only scare people off by asking them at once to go in and abide there, by pressing them to admit that those lands are better than their own.

In making arrangements for a Conference, three points must be kept in view: (*a*) the discussion must be leisurely; (*b*) there must be ample opportunity for intercourse; and (*c*) there must be intervals to allow for development or modification of ideas.

(*a*) The discussion must be leisurely. A man can answer quickly

where he is using prepared materials, and he speaks quickly when defending or attacking a known and fixed position. When a man is weighing the possible meanings of a new position, he must think carefully and he will speak slowly. A premature answer is dangerous, because a man does not like to retire from a positive statement once made. It is much easier for a man to tell us how a thing strikes him at the moment, if he knows there will be opportunity for a more considered statement afterwards, and it is often a real help to be allowed to compare the two.

(b) There must be opportunities for intercourse. Everybody knows that in parliaments and congresses, the most valuable work is constantly done in the lobbies and smoke-rooms rather than in full-dress debates. A Conference without intercourse is little better than a show.

Our third point we must postpone for a moment while we consider the bearing of these two on the actual arrangements of a Conference, which will necessarily vary with circumstances. A large Conference will meet as it can. Real progress will take place only in private or in "intercourse."

In small Conferences it is a very good way to bring representatives together for a few days' retreat at some pleasant place, and this is the only possible way if the representatives are drawn from a wide area. If, however, they are drawn from one locality, it is easy to hold a series of meetings at intervals.

The meetings would normally begin with papers or statements of the main positions to be discussed, followed perhaps by a few questions to clear up any uncertainties. In large Conferences the discussion, so called, consists of little more than statements intended to explain the views of other speakers, either as a whole or in reference to particular points raised. In small Conferences it is well to have a short discussion in order to select the points from which the true discussion should begin.

To make a discussion real, it is an immense advantage if the preliminary statements can be written and circulated beforehand. Where this is not done, it may be noticed that the following speakers hardly ever do more than ventilate some stray idea they happened to bring with them. If, as generally is the case, it is

not possible to have the papers circulated beforehand, it is all the more important that the discussion should not follow till after the interval for intercourse. Of course it is possible to treat the opening statements as a mere overture, but if they are to be taken seriously, men must have time after the subjects have been set out to make up their minds what they really do think before they are asked to talk.

(c) What has just been said about the arrangement of the time is emphasizing mainly the need of leisureliness, but our third point was the need of allowing time for the development of thought. So far as the Conferences themselves are concerned, it is rarely possible to adjourn discussions in large Conferences, or in Retreat Conferences, beyond the limits of the actual meeting, because it is seldom possible to bring the same people together again. In local Conferences it may be often possible to arrange for a debate being carried on at meetings held once a week, or once a month, so long as real progress is being made, and if the members are keen to do so. The Conference will generally be able to tell when it has gone as far as it can comfortably and profitably go. If such adjournment is possible, some notes ought to be kept to insure the discussion being resumed at the right point.

The real importance of this question will appear if we ask, "What time should be allowed for the reconciliation of opposing convictions?" And we ought not to be unprepared for the real answer, "Perhaps one, and possibly two, generations." Few of those who go to Conferences holding firmly the convictions and habits of a lifetime can modify them very seriously.

Our Conferences will go all the better if we leave a few hours between the statement and the discussion of a question, our discussions will sometimes progress a little further if we renew them after a week's interval; but it is impossible that the divisions of three centuries should be bought out in this small coinage. Nevertheless, the foresight of responsible thinkers must prepare the way for great changes. Perhaps, and indeed probably, we ourselves cannot go further than to see that what we have taken to be antithetical convictions ought to be, need to be, might be, reconciled. It is well not to anticipate that we shall effect more than this; but

if we descry the land afar off, our children, freed from the fetters of an inherited alienation, may reach it if we cannot; and there is always the possibility that we ourselves, patiently advancing, may find our way there.

IV. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED RULES FOR CONFERENCES

(1) *Objects*

(i) The first object of the Conference is to enable its members to learn what are the actual convictions held by others, what exactly these convictions mean to them, on what they really rest, and how they are applied.

(ii) In the belief that all true convictions must mean more to a man than he has ever fully realized, we may expect that as we consider the needs and perplexities of others, we may gain a better understanding also of the meaning of our own convictions.

(iii) Since no one man can have faced all the needs of life, it is possible that convictions which we have taken as antithetical may, on fuller examination, prove to contain much which is really complementary. It is possible to conceive of an ultimate reconciliation in which the convictions of all might find a place, and that such a reconciliation might provide a fuller view of Christianity and a more complete satisfaction for the needs of men than any one position standing by itself.

(iv) It is fully recognized that any considerable development of views or even modifications of attitude on such subjects can only be the result of prolonged thought. The immediate objects hoped for are, (A) that a better mutual understanding may allay the sense of irreconcilable opposition; (B) that such understanding may suggest to us new ideas and possibilities for further consideration.

It is not requisite that the Conference should come to formal conclusions, or propose practical measures.

(2) *Membership*

(i) In coming together no one is pledged to more than a willingness to explain his own position, and a desire to understand the position of others, to the best of his power.

(ii) The Conference will be limited to those actually taking part, or at most to those who will approach it in the spirit required.

It is not contemplated that there should be any general admission of the public, or any formal publication of the results of the Conference, though a summary of the proceedings should be kept for reference.

(iii) Since it is probable that in discussions new questions, or new aspects of questions, will be brought up, the members should speak frankly without feeling themselves unduly committed to views they may express as the Conference proceeds.

(3) *Form of Conference*

(i) The Conference will consist of two parts:

(a) In the first there will be statements, either by selected speakers, or by members in turn. Questions should be asked when necessary for the elucidation of points not clearly understood.

(b) There will be a discussion of selected points brought up in the statement.

Opportunities will be given for private discussion and intercourse.

(ii) There will be a Chairman, whose business it is to guide the discussion in accordance with the purpose of the Conference, but it is intended that the discussions shall be in the nature of a friendly conversation, so that a speaker may be at liberty to restate or amend explanations which have not fully expressed his meaning.

(iii) A sufficient interval will be made between the first and second parts of the Conference to give time for thinking over the statements before the discussion commences.

Where this is not possible, the statements should be written and circulated beforehand. This is always an advantage. It is almost useless to expect men to discuss effectively a statement they have only just heard.

In dealing with new aspects of questions, it is often a great advantage to adjourn discussion so as to allow time for reconsideration. This would permit all parties to defer explanations or questions on points which they had not previously thought of.

(4) *Representation*

(i) Each member must be regarded as the sole authority for the

statement and explanation of his own views. All other members of the Conference are only inquirers.

(ii) In discussion the inquirers are at liberty to point out inconsistencies, difficulties, or objections, which seem to them involved in the views of another. But, in accordance with the courtesy of debate, it should be clear that these are put as inquiries with a view to learning how the representative answers the difficulties; they should not be put as with an implied assumption that they cannot be answered.

(iii) So in the course of inquiry the judgment of the representative must, for the purposes of the Conference, be accepted as to what is or is not implied in, or consistent with, the views he represents.

(5) *Sectionalism*

(i) The Conference is primarily concerned with the principles or convictions of religious bodies as such, and not with views of particular parties or sections. As, however, the true principles of a body are in many cases not exactly determinable, it is inevitable that the Conference should consider the views held by it as shown by its practice.

(ii) In such questions the rule of representation must apply. It belongs to the representatives of each body to state and explain the principles of their own body. So, also, it belongs to them to state the views of different parties in the body, and to explain how much these differences really mean, what practical effect they have, and how they are reconciled in practice.

(iii) The representative of any body, though he can, of course, only explain things as he understands them, must speak for his body, rather than of his own personal views. He must be ready to explain at once, if necessary, how far his explanation would be accepted by other parties. If there is a section of his own body to whose views he is entirely opposed, he ought to say simply that he cannot explain their position.

(6) *Discussions*

(i) Both in explanation and in discussion the Conference should seek for, and the representative as leader should try to give, the

real reasons on which his convictions rest, and which determine their meaning, rather than the arguments by which he thinks they might be justified. If it should be convenient to cite arguments, the representative ought to consider how much weight his own mind really gives them, making it clear whether he offers them as an additional support, as an elucidation, or as the real substance of the conviction.

(ii) It will commonly be found that the differences between opposed views are only derivative, being a result of a difference on some more fundamental question to which the opposed sides are assuming different answers. Under such circumstances the discussion becomes a mere confusion, unless the question is shifted to the examination of the more fundamental points. The Conference can do a real service in finding out the underlying questions to which primary consideration ought to be given. If circumstances permit, the Conference should not allow itself to be deterred by rules from following these questions up.

(iii) When an absolute difference of view appears in regard to a fundamental question, the Conference can do no more. But (a) many apparent oppositions are due, at least very largely, to the use of terms in different senses; (b) absolute oppositions are an inevitable result of questions which assume that there are only two exclusive alternatives,—in the form “either . . . or . . . ?” Fundamental alternatives are, however, very seldom exclusive. If the two parties are asked what weight they would allow to each factor and in what connection they would place them, a considerable approximation would generally be found.

(7) *Criticism*

(i) There are certain descriptive terms, such as narrow-mindedness, dogma, schism, heresy, which have a sound scientific meaning, but which each theological circle applies in a conventional sense, generally to describe tendencies it dislikes. To assume that sense in a general discussion is purely question-begging and apt to be offensive. The terms, however, often do summarize objections and antipathies which are only realized vaguely. A great service is done if, in the course of inquiry, we can learn what is the real

attitude of others towards what we commonly express in this way to ourselves.

(ii) Criticism is in itself a necessary part of intellectual activity. The bitterness of our criticism is a consequence of our separation which acts in two ways: (a) we criticize sharply because we are perplexed as to the real meaning of a position to which we feel ourselves to be outsiders; (b) criticism is embittered by its own ineffectiveness where it can gain no hearing. It is the business of the Conference to meet the first of these difficulties by providing the opportunities for inquiry, but, for its own sake, the Conference must discourage the expression of bitterness in criticism. Only those who are the objects of criticism can remove the cause of bitterness by their readiness to listen in a good spirit, by their willingness to confess the failures of which they are conscious, and even the possibilities of defects of which they are not conscious. Resentment and the fear of resentment only check the outward expression of criticism. Self-justification and repudiation force a critic to justify his attacks, but humility and gentleness call out consideration and deference.

Lastly, and most important, if Conferences are to be effective in preparing the way for the reunion of Christendom, we must recognize that we ourselves are powerless, and that God alone can give us grace to find and accept that unity which He desires.

That can be done only by prayer, and by prayer such as perhaps we never have known,—prayer in which we place ourselves utterly at God's disposal so that we may learn and do His Will,—prayer which shall thoroughly purge our hearts and minds of prejudice and partisanship, and of misunderstanding as well of God's revelation of Himself as of our brethren. Every Conference should, therefore, begin and end in prayer, for in the atmosphere of real prayer, truly seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Love and Truth, Conferences will succeed where centuries of controversy have failed.

The Publications previous to this were:

1. Report and Resolution of the Protestant Episcopal Church suggesting the Conference, and Report and Resolutions of the National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States looking to Reunion with the Protestant Episcopal Church.
2. Report and Resolution of the Protestant Episcopal Church suggesting the Conference.
3. Report of April 20, 1911, of the Committee on Plan and Scope of the Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church.
12. The World Conference and the Problem of Unity. By the Rev. Francis J. Hall, D.D.
13. Letter to the Council of the Old Catholic Churches in Europe.
14. An Official Statement by the Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church.
15. Prayer and Unity.
16. Questions of Faith and Order for Consideration by the Proposed Conference. By the Rt. Rev. A. C. A. Hall, D.D., Bishop of Vermont.
17. A Bibliography of Topics related to Church Unity. By the Rev. F. J. Hall, D.D.
18. Unity or Union: Which? By the Rt. Rev. P. M. Rhineland, D.D., Bishop of Pennsylvania.
19. The Conference Spirit.
20. The Manifestation of Unity. By the Rt. Rev. C. P. Anderson, D.D., Bishop of Chicago.
21. List of Commissions appointed up to March 20, 1914.
23. Report to the General Convention of 1913 of the Protestant Episcopal Church by the Commission appointed by that Church.
24. A First Preliminary Conference.
25. Report of the Committee on Church Unity of the National Council of Congregational Churches, 1913.
26. A World Movement for Christian Unity. By the Rev. Lefferd M. A. Haughwout.
27. Second Meeting of the Advisory Committee. Report of the Second Deputation to Great Britain. The Call for a Truce of God.

Numbers 4-11, inclusive, and 22 are translations of Number 2 into Modern Greek, Latin, Italian, Russian, Swedish, German, French, Dutch and Spanish.

PRAYERS

The following are the Prayers which have been suggested for Public and Private Use. They may be obtained, printed on a card, in any quantity, on application to the Secretary, Robert H. Gardiner, Post Office Box 1153, Gardiner, Maine, U. S. A.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEACE AND UNITY OF THE CHURCH

O LORD JESUS CHRIST, Who saidst unto Thine Apostles, Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; Regard not our sins, but the faith of Thy Church, and grant her that peace and unity which is agreeable to Thy will, Who livest and reignest God for ever and ever. Amen.

O GOD of Peace, Who through Thy Son Jesus Christ didst set forth One Faith for the salvation of mankind; Send Thy grace and heavenly blessing upon all Christian people who are striving to draw nearer to Thee, and to each other, in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace. Give us penitence for our divisions, wisdom to know Thy truth, courage to do Thy will, love which shall break down the barriers of pride and prejudice, and an unswerving loyalty to Thy Holy Name. Suffer us not to shrink from any endeavor, which is in accordance with Thy will, for the peace and unity of Thy Church. Give us boldness to seek only Thy glory and the advancement of Thy Kingdom. Unite us all in Thee as Thou, O Father, with Thy Son and the Holy Spirit, art One God, world without end. Amen.

O LORD JESUS CHRIST, look with pity, we beseech Thee, upon Thy Church weakened and hindered by differences and divisions; bless the effort to bring together in conference all who confess the faith of Thy Holy Name, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

